

GERONIMO'S BOYHOOD.

The Old Apache Chief Tells About His People.

Mount Vernon (Ala.) letter to New York Sun: Now that Apache prisoners of war are soon to be moved away from Mount Vernon barracks, Ala., a few facts regarding the boyhood of the great chief Geronimo—pronounced "Hayronimo"—may be of interest to the public. A few days ago the writer invited the old chief to his house, with the interpreter, Mr. Wrattan, who has been with the Apaches ever since they were removed from Arizona in 1886, and under the solace of a good cigar he recalled, and seemed to take much pleasure while doing so, many of the incidents of his boyhood days.

"I am about 59 or 60 years old," he said, "and for an Indian that is being pretty old. Nana is 94, but he is a very old man, much older than many of the Indians get to be. I was born on my father's ranch, way up on the table land at the head of the Gila river, in Arizona, while it was still a part of Mexico. All of our people were an agricultural and pastoral people, tilling the soil to raise our wheat and corn and vegetables, and herding our cattle and horses and sheep. We knew very little of war. Of course we had fights with other Indians once in a while when they came to our homes to steal our stock or our women, and when we retaliated, going in our turn to the homes of our enemies for the same purpose. Our people have lived on these table lands for many years, and many of our men had never seen the face of a white man. The nearest Mexicans lived on the Rio Grande, many, many miles away, and we lived our lives, married our wives, and raised our family happily and undisturbed.

"As a boy I worked with the rest planting corn, pulling grass for the cattle, and such things. We had to pull the grass by the roots or else twist it off, for we had no way of cutting it. We did not know what scythes and sickles were, and the big knives cost much money, or, what was the same as money to us, our corn and wheat and stock and skins.

"As far as the traditions go back, our method of farming originated with ourselves, and we planted corn by digging little holes in the ground with knives or sharp sticks and putting into each hole two or three grains of corn, then covering them up with our fingers.

"My grandfather was a chief, but my father was not one. Our chiefs are not exactly elected, but they are chosen in this way. A party of young men will go out on a hunt or on a horse-stealing expedition. One of these young men will be chosen leader. If he is a good man—that is, strong in his head, of good char-

acter among his companions, brave, undaunted, and a good fighter and provider he will become stronger and stronger and his band will increase. If he isn't strong in his head, if he proves to be weak or cowardly, if he is not like the fox or like the wolf his following will leave him and join other chiefs, and that one will become great while he will be as nothing, and will become a laughing-stock among his companions. Sometimes such a chief will leave his own tribe and join another where he is not well known; but when he joins the other tribe he joins it as a common man, not as a chief. Indians are like white men—they get what they can and they keep what they get, unless a stronger man gets it away.

"My father died when I was 9 or 10 years old, and I had to take care of myself.

"When I was 14 or 15 years old I and three other boys about the same age went out hunting all by ourselves. This was the first time I had gone on a hunt. We had good bows and arrows that we had made ourselves. We saw three deer running away over on the other side of a deep ravine. The deer ran this way and that way, and they would jump and run and jump again as they flew over the broken ground. We were all excited, but I was not as excited as the rest. I got down on my knee and carefully aimed at one of the deer, then let my arrow fly, and it went all the way through him, part of the arrow coming out on the other side. Oh! but we were excited and glad. How we laughed and clapped our hands. We felt so good we could not help laughing and feeling glad.

"By and by we built a fire and cut the deer up and roasted the pieces in the ashes and on the coals, and we ate the deer up; we ate the whole of it. My! but it was good. I can almost taste it now. That was my first deer. Of course I had shot gophers and birds with my bow and arrow, many times at home in the village; that is the way Indian boys learn to shoot. They begin to use a small bow and arrows before they can walk, almost.

"After this hunt I turned hunter and supported myself this way; then got married and supported my wife and afterward my family by hunting. I bought horses; the valleys and table lands of the Gila are good places for horses. I always used horses for hunting and was getting rich.

"One day some Mexicans came to our village to steal while I was on a hunt. During the fight they killed my wife and two papooses, about 3 and 5 years old.

"When I came back and found my wife dead and my children dead it made my heart sorry for myself and hard for the Mexicans."

Geronimo was asked if he killed any

Mexicans in retaliation, but he wouldn't talk about war or fighting. He said, "I will not talk about the warpath."

Resuming he said: "One time, about thirty or forty years ago, the Mexicans got a lot of us Apaches down to a town in Sonora to make a treaty. The Mexicans brought out large buckets of whisky, with tin cups, and they told us to help ourselves. Most of the Apaches were fools enough to drink, and they got drunk, and the Mexicans attacked all that were drunk and killed every one of them. I and two or three others that did not drink got on our horses and rode away. The Mexicans killed every one of the others, six women and thirty-four men. They killed every one of them. That is the way they want to make treaty with us, to kill us all. Whisky is not good. Whisky bad, awful bad; no good, no good at all. I have never drunk whisky, so I never got caught.

"Another time the Mexicans killed a party of over eighty. We thought we were strong enough for them this time, but they played the same trick, and the fool Apaches got drunk and were killed. I no get drunk and I get away every time.

"The Mexicans often played the same trick on all the Indian tribes.

"The white people came to our country after the Mexican war. They liked our table lands, so they ran us off. They ran us out on the plains and up in the mountains, and they took our beautiful table lands for themselves.

"I guess I have talked enough for one day. If I talk too much I may not tell the truth all the time, and I want to speak the truth always. Good-by."

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